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Making a Difference: Language Teaching for Intercultural and International Dialogue

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ABSTRACT: Language teaching has long been associated with teaching in a country or countries where a target language is spoken; but this approach is inadequate. In the contemporary world, language teaching has a responsibility to prepare learners for interaction with people of other cultural backgrounds, teaching them skills and attitudes as well as knowledge. This article presents the main concepts involved in this view of language teaching: the notion of culture, the language-culture nexus and intercultural competence. It also explains the implications of the approach in terms of the skills, attitudes and knowledge which should be taught. The article goes further. It argues that language teaching needs to be linked to other disciplines in order to develop an approach which integrates insights from citizenship education. All of this has implications for teachers' professional identifications and cooperation across the curriculum.

Keywords: Intercultural communication, teaching culture, multi-disciplinary curriculum, critical and higher-level thinking, intercultural competence, teacher development

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In 2010, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan proclaimed "To prosper economically and to improve relations with other countries Americans need to read, speak and understand other languages" (US Department of Education, 2010, ¶12). The significance of this, seven years later, needs scarcely to be underlined. Global and national challenges increase daily and the modes of talking across frontiers and languages become ever more aggressive. In this article we argue that, in this new context, language teaching must include intercultural communicative competence as its aim and this means that language teaching professionals must accept their social and political responsibilities, and change their professional identities.

While proclamations in favor of foreign language education and its effects on international or intercultural understanding are by no means rare, language educators and administrators in English-speaking countries often face challenges from sceptics. They either doubt the validity of foreign language study because they believe that English suffices as means of communication, or they claim that language study in schools cannot prepare students to achieve the desired level of proficiency. The anglophone perspective is currently very significant in Britain. In the British newspaper *The Guardian,* at a moment of European divisions and Brexit, one of its pundits, Simon Jenkins (2017), argues that language learning is not necessary, and that there are always other ways to understand other countries. He takes the example of Germany to make this point:

> Germany is Europe's most important country of our day. Teach its history, revel in its culture, analyse the strength of its economy. Visit its cities and countryside – and see how much better they are planned and protected than ours. In comparison, learning Germany's language is not that important. (¶ 7)

Jenkins' view is refuted by a well-known academic, Mary Beard (2017), with panache:

> Even where in Europe the lingua franca of (academic) papers is English, I can promise you that the language of the bar isn't (or the toilets, for that matter). You get left out of an awful lot of what is really going on if you can only communicate in English. (¶ 6)

In this article, we show that learning about countries and cultures from an interdisciplinary perspective (including history, geography, mathematics) related to the languages we teach is, and should be, part of world language education for intercultural communication, but also that intercultural skills as well as knowledge are required. Language education needs to play a leading role in the development of our students' 'intercultural communicative competence', i.e. combining language skills with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes, that help them become 'intercultural citizens' (Byram, 2008), able to engage in intercultural communication, and to think and act critically and to negotiate the complexities of today's world.

While we shall here review the most relevant current theory and practice on teaching languages for intercultural communication - including the implications for teaching methodology, educators' professional identity, and the role of language education in the broader educational mission - we cannot be exhaustive as that would require a book-length treatment available for example in Garrett-Rucks (2016), Kramsch (2013), Liddicoat and Scarino (2013), Risager (2007), and others. We hope nonetheless to assist language educators in considering their important role and responsibility in educating intercultural citizens ready to live and thrive in multilingual and multicultural societies, including their own.

The language and culture nexus

That teaching 'culture' is part of 'language teaching' is an axiom widely shared among World Languages educators. That this assertion is interpreted in many ways is well-known. That

teaching culture as information about a country or 'the' countries where the target language is spoken, is a common and yet misguided interpretation, is perhaps less self-evident. For this approach is often present in textbooks and is hence widely adopted, because many educators rely on a textbook as their mainstay.

Williams (1983) said that 'culture' is one of the two or three most complex words in English, and attempted to gain some clarity by historical, etymological analysis. It is not surprising that some researchers (e.g. Dervin, 2011; Holliday, 2011) criticize the concept as no longer useful because culture is mistakenly viewed as a fixed entity and claim it should therefore be abandoned. Some argue (e.g. Holliday, 2011) that 'culture' is associated with 'methodological nationalism', a focus on national cultures which are used to reduce people's behavior to one element, "It's because he/she is American/Chinese/French etc.". It is certainly true that, in common parlance, 'culture' is poly-semantic and inexact, and often not afforded the complex description it deserves. On the other hand, it remains part of language educators' vocabulary and cannot simply be ignored. Moreover, although reductionism must be avoided, the concept of 'national culture' is part of people's conscious and subconscious understanding as can be seen in Billig's (1995) analysis of *banal nationalism*.

Culture has therefore a pedagogical usefulness, and is undoubtedly used by both educators and students in their teaching and learning. Pedagogy involves making accessible to learners matters which are complex. Part of this task is to simplify before adding complexity. Language educators do this constantly with respect to teaching grammatical know-how and know-that (Ryle, 1945) When they teach advanced learners, the complexity can be acknowledged by abandoning a term, or by using it in its full complexity and richness.

Let us consider then how some pedagogical theorists – rather than anthropologists or others – use the concept. Holliday (1999) says the "large culture paradigm' – by which he

refers to cultures of large groups of people including national cultures - risks becoming 'ethnic, national or international stereotyping" (p. 237) and argues for a focus on the cultures of small cohesive groups of people. Risager (2007) uses the term 'linguaculture' to emphasise the relationship between language and culture and argues for a transnational paradigm to replace the national, a position which emphasises the complexity of language use and the flows of linguacultures across national boundaries.

Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) review a range of ways of analysing culture and argue that it is necessary to integrate them in language teaching and learning. They present a continuum where at one end culture is most apparent in people's behavior and at the other end the ways in which language embodies cultural meanings is dominant.

Another widespread misconception held even by language educators, perhaps because of their identity as *language* educators, is that culture and language are inextricably bound together. In other words, educators assume that they automatically teach culture or even intercultural competence when they teach a language. In her seminal work, Risager (2006 and 2007) argues that this is not the case.

Firstly, from a 'sociological point of view', Risager says (2006), the two can be separated in three ways:

- learners of language X import into it the meanings and connotations from their existing languages, whether first language or others;
- discourse about a topic spreads from language to language even though translation processes may affect it;
- as people migrate, they carry their discourse and ways of thinking – and the connotations of what they say – into new contexts and languages (pp. 194ff);

and, we would add, languages are adopted and modified by societies as their 'national' or 'official' language and acquire new meanings, forms and connotations.

Secondly, however, Risager argues, from a 'psychological point of view', that for the individual, the cultural resources embodied in a language - the linguistic forms, and practices, the connotations, the discourse practices - are inseparable. The lifelong process of experiencing and acquiring new language is unique to the individual for whom experience and language are one. This view then supports a pedagogical approach which goes beyond the teaching of discrete facts, and instead helps students explore the relationship between their previous experiences in one (or more) languages and those acquired in new languages.

Thirdly, from a 'linguistic-system oriented point of view', Risager goes on to say, one can analyse a specific version of a particular language, and identify the semiotic system and its relationship to the grammatical system. In this case, the relationship is tight, and one which many language educators have examined as they learnt their language in depth, but when put into practice in discourse, the relationship loosens into the situations described under the 'sociological point of view'.

Taking a similar perspective, and emphasizing the dynamic nature of discourse, Kramsch introduced the concept of symbolic competence, which has three dimensions: symbolic representation, symbolic action, symbolic power (Kramsch, 2011a). Demonstrating the complexity of intercultural exchanges, Kramsch (2011a, p.366,) emphasizes the need for a "symbolic mentality" where subjective experience, past and present, is as important as social convention in interpreting other people's ways of being communicating and interacting. According to Kramsch (2011a, p. 360) the *interculturally competent speaker* asks the following questions:

• Not which words, but whose words are those? Whose discourse? Whose interests are being served by this text?

• What made these words possible, and others impossible?

• How does the speaker position him/herself?

• How does he/she frame the events talked about?

• What prior discourses does he/she draw on?

Kramsch thus gives prominence to the language element of the language-culture nexus, whilst emphasizing its situatedness and the importance of being able to interpret this.

What does all this mean for language education for intercultural communication?

Language educators must be aware of all of the dimensions of Risager's and Kramsch's analysis of the language-culture nexus even though their awareness has often hitherto been dominated by the linguistic-system orientation because of the ways in which they learnt language. Choices have to be made from a sociological perspective. In the case of beginners in particular, learners acquire one version of a language as used in one context even while the educator remains aware of how learners import their own meanings and connotations, and slowly amend them towards what are usually considered to be the shared meanings of the speakers in that context. Teachers and learners have until recently assumed that the speakers in question are the 'native' speakers and the context a 'national' context, and they have used reference books from nation X as the authority in cases of doubt about grammar or semantics. The increasing importance of linguae francae – notably Spanish and English – challenges this definition of context and speaker, and suggests that learners' own imported connotations and linguistic practices do not need to be modified to those of a 'native speaker' in quite the same way as in the past. This has major implications for teachers and the concept of intercultural competence.

Even more importantly, language educators need to pay attention to how students' identities are shaped by how their existing languages, and how associated experiences are

fostered or denied through language education. Teaching languages for intercultural communication, the way we envision here, takes into account the complex interplay of our students' identities in different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Knowing and understanding other people and societies involves knowledge and understanding of oneself and one's own society. This is captured in the latest Norwegian curriculum, an example of the current culmination of gradual shifts in pedagogical theory:

> Competences in language and culture shall give the individual the possibility to understand, to 'live into' and value other cultures' social life and life at work, their modes and conditions of living, their way of thinking, their history, art and literature. The area of study (languages) can also contribute to *developing interest and tolerance, develop insight in one's own conditions of life and own identity,* and contribute to a joy in reading, creativity, experience and personal development.
>
> (Our (literal) translation with emphasis added)
>
> https://www.udir.no/kl06/PSP1-01/Hele/Formaal - accessed March 2017

However, as van Ek (1986) pointed out three decades ago, there is often a gap between the 'lofty ideals' of prefaces to curricula and the details of curriculum content and teaching methodology, and this is still a problem today, when curricula introductions refer to intercultural understanding but the focus of the document remains on language competence.

That organisations such as ACTFL through its publications - e.g. the World-Readiness Standards (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2013), and the newly unveiled *NCSSFL/ACTFL Can Do Statements for Intercultural Communication*, and the Council of Europe with its *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* and a new volume of descriptors including those for 'pluricultural competence' - are attempting to change this and with what success, is an issue we can only note here as

important. These new articulations of educational aims and objectives nonetheless demonstrate the significance of intercultural competence. The *NCSSFL/ACTFL Can Do Statements for Intercultural Communication,* for example, help language learners as well as educators gauge what they can do to "use the language to investigate, explain, and reflect on the relationship between the practices or products and perspectives of cultures" (p.1) at different performance levels.

Intercultural competence

As we hinted above, the notion of 'the native speaker', where the inclusion of the definite article suggests a uniformity among users of a language is now much challenged and discussed (e.g., Davies, 2003; May 2014). It is no longer automatically an ideal towards which learners should strive and which they can seldom attain. This change has happened in parallel with descriptions and definitions of a new model specifically for the cultural dimension of the language/culture nexus, 'the intercultural speaker'.

In addition to being an ideal for linguistic competence and performance, the notion of the native speaker as a model for cultural learning - understood as knowledge that/propositional knowledge (Ryle, 1945) about a country, its people and its high culture - has probably lain dormant in most language educators' minds; there has been an unspoken assumption that learners should know what native speakers know. 'Knowledge that' is still an influential concept even if the native speaker as model for linguistic competence is in decline. On the other hand, as all educators have increasingly acknowledged the importance of 'knowledge how'/procedural knowledge, the concept of 'competence' has become widely used, with language educators being no exception. Chomsky's use of 'competence' and 'performance' (1965) reinforced this tendency very substantially as these words became part

of language teachers vocabulary irrespective of the relevance of his theory. Competence in culture has come to replace knowledge about culture, and there have been several terms coined, with 'intercultural competence', 'transcultural competence' (e.g., Biell and Doff, 2014; Meyer, 1991; Kramsch, 2011b), and 'cross-cultural competence' (e.g., Ward & Ward, 2003) being the most frequently used.

Among pedagogy theorists, the term 'intercultural' is dominant but this has been challenged with the suggestion that 'transcultural' – or 'transkulturell' since the challenge comes mainly from German writers – is better (e.g. Biell and Doff, 2014). 'Intercultural' was used by Byram and Zarate (1996) in coining the term 'intercultural speaker' to contrast with 'native speaker' as a model for competence in culture. It was also linked to the notion of 'mediation' (e.g., Byram, 1997; Zarate, et al. 2004) which usually refers to acting as go-between and link between two people or groups. What is especially important for educators and students to reflect on is the difference between being able to live in two cultures (or being bicultural, as if one were two native speakers in one person), often seen as the ill-conceived and impossible ideal towards which to strive in teaching and learning, and on the other hand, being able to act as mediator between people of two or more different cultural and linguistic contexts, using one's intercultural skills and attitudes. The latter, as has been shown in a number of projects (Byram et al. 2016; Wagner, Perugini, and Byram, 2017), is a practical aim which can be reached through education. It entails the crucial skills required for students to decentre from their taken-for-granted and unquestioned world perspectives in order to see how others see the world and 'how others see us'.

There are many definitions and models of intercultural competence, reviewed by Spitzberg and Changnon (2009), many of which are more useful in training people for commercial and industrial contexts. A definition for educators is as follows:

"Intercultural competence is a combination of attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills applied through action which enables one, either singly or together with others, to:

— understand and respect people who are perceived to have different cultural affiliations from oneself;

— respond appropriately, effectively and respectfully when interacting and communicating with such people;

— establish positive and constructive relationships with such people;

— understand oneself and one's own multiple cultural affiliations through encounters with cultural "difference" (Huber & Reynolds, 2014, p.16-17).

On this basis, it is argued in this publication and many others, that all educators can contribute to developing intercultural competence, but here we shall focus on the pedagogy needed in world languages teaching.

Pedagogical implications

Pedagogical approaches and methods should be developed from theories of learning, and for language teaching there has been industrious research for many years on second language learning. This is not the case for research on culture-and-language learning, for although there is psychological research on how people learn and change during temporary or permanent residence in a new country (e.g. Bennett, 1986; Ward, Furnham, & Bochner, 2001), the under-developed nature of the aims and objectives of the cultural dimension in language teaching has meant a lack of clarity on which theories or even what kind of theories are needed.

Second Language Acquisition research might be relevant and has in recent years been linked to theories of learning which take account of socio-cultural context and social constructivism. Research on language learners' identity and change of identity depending on the linguistic and cultural context as well as issues of power in language classrooms (e.g., Norton, 2014; Palmer & Martínez, 2013; Garcia-Mateus & Palmer, 2017) also plays an important role.

The formulation of educational aims and the concepts of intercultural competence and the intercultural speaker give a new perspective to the task of finding appropriate theory. It is not a question of imitating SLA research but of using theories of acquisition of the skills, knowledge and attitudes of which intercultural competence is composed. This approach has the advantage that general theories of learning become appropriate and the disadvantage that such theories remain general (e.g. Bandura, 1986; Klafki, 1991; Kolb, 2014). Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) conclude from their analysis of learning theories that language learning within an intercultural perspective requires "an understanding of culture as facts, artifacts, information and social practices, as well as an understanding of culture as the lens through which people mutually interpret and communicate meaning" (p.46). We thus need theories of how knowledge is acquired and this is not a major problem, but we also need to find theories of how skills and attitudes are learnt and therefore best taught. This search can be aided by a more precise definition of intercultural competence.

Models of intercultural competence have appeared in recent decades which help educators to plan the cultural dimension into their methods; Risager (2007) provides the best historical and contemporary survey and analysis. Byram's model (1997) has been influential, according to Spitzberg and Changnon (2009), and has the distinctive feature that it encourages critical reflection on learners' own perspectives as well as on those of others, with the notion of "critical cultural awareness: an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of

explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries" (Byram, 1997, p.53).

Few if any of these models are explicit about learning theory and application of them and collections such as Wagner, Perugini, and Byram (2017) have so far relied upon a general approach to experiential learning. On the other hand, world languages educators already have considerable experience of planning their teaching in terms of objectives, learning outcomes and the use of 'can do' statements. This has been one major benefit of communicative language teaching. The publication of the ACTFL 'Can do Statements for Intercultural Communication' provides a means of enriching lesson planning with intercultural competence as the outcome.

A further development which is of a more experimental nature is to bring into the world languages curriculum an action-oriented approach underpinned by citizenship education, to teach 'intercultural citizenship'. 'Content-Based Instruction' (e.g., Snow, 2001; see also Content and language integrated learning (CLIL), e.g., Coyle, 2007) has shown how world languages can be acquired more efficiently by using them to teach other subjects. This new approach seeks to give the language classroom a content which is cognitively and emotionally demanding. Language educators propose to their students that they engage with significant issues in their own and other countries, such as environmental problems (Porto et al., 2017) or political and historical conflicts (Porto & Yulita, 2017). In doing so students acquire greater linguistic proficiency and the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the intercultural speaker. Students are encouraged - as they are in citizenship education and service learning (Rauschert & Byram, 2017) - to become directly engaged with their own and other communities, to take what they learn in the classroom beyond the classroom walls, into the 'here and now'. For example, they study environmental matters in their own and a target

language country and then conduct surveys and get involved in the issues affecting their immediate community.

Where do we go from here?

We have so far demonstrated that intercultural competence is not an automatic by-product of *language* teaching. Rather language educators need to make a conscious decision to teach languages for intercultural communication. This, in turn, requires both a theoretical framework and a learning theory that take into account the dynamic nature of languages and cultures and of all communication and interaction. Rather than focusing exclusively on linguistic aspects of language, language educators should plan their teaching - with the help of the new objectives and descriptors from ACTFL mentioned above - to help their students acquire and use linguistic and intercultural competence in their relationships with others in their immediate community, in their national community or at the international level, applying what they learn in the classroom to the here and now.

Beyond this immediate concern to improve methodology, the educational aims which emphasise, as in the example from Norway, the contribution of language teaching to the development of the individual and of society, provide all the justification we might need to envisage language teaching as an integral part of the curriculum. This means, first of all, that teachers of a particular language, say Spanish, can cooperate with other language educators, say Chinese, to develop a vision of the complementarity of teaching skills and attitudes in intercultural competence even if the knowledge component may differ. Secondly, the development of students' (multilingual and multicultural) identities is a crucial matter in which language educators have a special responsibility. All language educators need to

address the whole student and to give students the opportunity to develop their language skills and their identities through interactions with others of other cultural affiliations.

If language educators collaborate to develop their students' skills and attitudes - the 'knowing how' or 'can do' approach - related to intercultural competence, rather than promoting 'knowledge about' national cultures, they facilitate their students' development of skills which are relevant to every aspect of their lives. Students then come to value language education as education for developing their identities rather than as the learning of a code which can only be used in some restricted environments.

Furthermore, world language educators can become advocates for all language learners in all school settings, not just their own classrooms. Colleagues might not yet understand how encouraging an emergent bilingual student to use their first language for learning can be helpful in their personal development (Flores & García, 2013; García, Flores, & Woodley, 2012; Gort, 2015; Gutiérrez, Baquedano-Lopez, & Tejeda, 1999); the language expert can support colleagues in understanding the significance of this. At the same time, bringing such students' cultural affiliations into the classroom - encouraging them to talk about their different perspectives on the subjects they learn - can create affordances for intercultural learning for all students.

Taking this a step further, we argue for both educators and students to reflect critically on their actions and roles in and outside the classroom. When language teaching is seen from this viewpoint, it becomes clear that it has a role in education for social justice, as has been argued in the USA for some years (e.g., Glynn, Weseley, & Wassell, 2014; Nieto, 2010; Osborn, 2006; Reagan & Osborn, 2002). There are important parallels between fostering social justice and developing intercultural citizenship. Both concepts promote criticality, in that educators enable students to reflect critically on language, discourse, and culture with

regard to power and inequality. In both approaches, educators foster students' engagement in important societal issues by applying the skills of intercultural competence which allow them to make critical judgments based on specific evidence.

The link of language education with education for citizenship and the link of intercultural citizenship with the development of criticality has also been established in international work (Byram, Golubeva, Han, & Wagner, 2016). More recently, in the USA, the significance of education for humility formulates aims which are harmonious with this aspect of language teaching but are also important – as are social justice and citizenship concepts – in other disciplines (Wagner, Cardetti, & Byram, in press).

In short, there is theoretical and practical justification for a vision of language teaching which enriches, and is enriched through, integration with other subjects and general cross-curricular principles. There is also evidence that language educators and pedagogical researchers working together have shown how they can generate new practices for the benefit of learners and their societies (see Byram, Golubeva, Han, & Wagner, 2016; Wagner, Perugini, & Byram, 2017). This is not easy, and research teams document and share the problems as well as the successes. Such work requires institutional cooperation time, but above all it requires language educators to see themselves in a different light. This brings us to the final question of language educators and their identities.

Language Educator Identities

It is difficult to learn a language, especially when this means using it in real time for communication, whether written or spoken. We do not need to remind our readers of this; they know it from their experience of teaching and of their own lifelong learning. Often, students find it hard to see applications of what they learn in language courses beyond the

activities in their language classrooms. Language educators tend to be seen, and perhaps see themselves, as 'a French teacher, 'a German teacher' or perhaps 'a French and German teacher', but the reference is always to language and the task of teaching and learning a difficult 'subject'. Important though this is, it is no longer enough, and though there may be resistance to the undoubted difficulty of re-thinking one's professional identity, it is crucial to do so not only as a matter of personal satisfaction with executing a worthwhile task but also as a matter of public recognition of the social and political significance of language teaching in its new guise.

What we promote here is a more complex and enriched understanding of language teaching, one that helps students reflect critically on their own identities as well as the dynamic processes of communication in which they engage in many different contexts. One which ensures language or linguaculture teaching is related directly to the learners' world. Rather than learning discrete aspects of language to 'apply' later, in this approach we encourage students to immediately apply what they learn to analyse the world around them and make critical judgements based on specific evidence. This 'critical cultural awareness' is exemplified in projects across the world. We provide tools for students to learn important information in another language by interacting with others, often in real time, in the target language. As a consequence, students see language education and the important knowledge, attitudes, and skills they acquire, as an important part of the educational mission, something they use right now and know they will continue to use.

Our vision requires change. Language educators need to critically examine their own professional identity and views of language and culture. They also need to re-examine their view of language education and its goals. This is likely to entail stepping out of one's comfort zone, for example by exploring unfamiliar content with students or collaborating with somebody in a subject area that seems *foreign* to them. It is not hard to see that this

process itself might require skills that have similarities with those found in intercultural competence. Ultimately, this can lead to a reconceptualization of language education as an important contributor to a number of educational missions. By teaching languages through a more holistic approach, and through content which is relevant to the students' lives and to society, we make sure we foster critical thinking skills while also teaching important knowledge about the world. Furthermore, through collaborative projects with other subjects, we help students understand the utility of language education in their lives beyond classroom walls.

Language teaching for intercultural communication is front and center in the educational mission of facilitating our students' participation in intercultural citizenship, which is a *sine qua non* in today's world.

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Submitted October 16, 2017

Accepted December 1, 2017